

## Message Text

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SUBJECT: INDIAN MEDIA AND THE TRANSITION IN WASHINGTON -- AN  
INTERPRETIVE VIEW

SUMMARY: INDIAN MEDIA, ESPECIALLY THE PRESS, COVERED THE STORY OF  
PRESIDENT NIXON'S RESIGNATION AND VICE-PRESIDENT FORD'S ACCESSION  
IN A VERY CONSTRUCTIVE MANNER IN BOTH THEIR NEWS STORIES AND  
EDITORIALS.

1. THE SPECTRUM OF ENGLISH-LANGUAGE NEWSPAPERS APPEARING IN INDIA  
ON AUGUST 10 SPONTANEOUSLY CONVEYED--BOTH IN NEWS TREATMENT AND  
EDITORIAL COMMENT--A PICTURE OF PEACEFUL AND CONSTITUTIONAL  
TRANSITION OF POWER IN THE US THAT COULD SCARCELY HAVE EMERGED  
MORE POSITIVELY HAD WE OURSELVES PROVIDED THE COPY AND DECREED THE  
MAKEUP.

2. MR. NIXON'S RESIGNATION HAD LARGELY BEEN DISPOSED OF ON  
FRIDAY, WHEN IT WAS ALREADY KNOWN THAT HE WOULD RESIGN, ALTHOUGH  
THE SPEECH ANNOUNCING HIS DECISION HERE IN THE EARLY MORNING  
HOURS OF FRIDAY. THUS SATURDAY'S PAPERS TOOK A FORWARD LOOK,  
HEADLINING THE FORD SWEARING IN AND HIS PLEDGE TO CONTINUE "AN  
UNINTERRUPTED AND SINCERE SEARCH FOR PEACE." PRESAGING THIS  
CONSTRUCTIVE VIEW OF THE CLIMAX OF THE WATERGATE STORY WAS A  
LONG EDITORIAL-PAGE STORY ON AUGUST 8 ENTITLED "US SYSTEM  
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PROVES SOUND" BY THE HINDUSTAN TIMES' WASHINGTON CORRESPONDENT,

KRISHAN BHATIA.

3. MAJOR ATTENTION WAS GIVEN TO ASSURANCES OF CONTINUITY IN FOREIGN POLICY AND TO COMMENT ON THE "TRIUMPH OF A SYSTEM," WHICH WAS A HINDUSTAN TIMES HEADLINE OVER A FRONT-PAGE BOX AND THE THEME OF MANY ANOTHER PAPER'S COMMENT.

4. GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED MEDIA--RADIO AND TV--GAVE TIME COMPARABLE TO THE EXTENSIVE SPACE GIVEN THE STORY BY THE PRINT PRESS, AND PLAYED THE NEWS STRAIGHT. BUT GUEST COMMENTATORS WHO HAD ACCESS TO THESE OFFICIAL CHANNELS ADDED A HINT OF POOR-MOUTHING, TRACING THE CRISIS TO DEFECTS IN AMERICAN SOCIETY, RATHER THAN HAILING THE PERFORMANCE OF A DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM. AN EXAMPLE OF THIS WAS JAWAHARIAL UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR M.S. VENKATARAMANI, WHO WAS HEARD AND SEEN ON A FRIDAY TV PANEL DEVOTED TO "THE RESIGNATION," AND HEARD AGAIN ON ALL-INDIA RADIO ON SATURDAY NIGHT COMMENTING ON "THE NEW MAN IN THE WHITE HOUSE."

5. THIS DIVERGENCE BETWEEN PRESS AND AIR TREATMENT, WHILE IT SHOULD NOT BE OVERSTRESSED, IS HARDLY ACCIDENTAL. FOR MORE THAN A YEAR, INDIAN EDITORS AND COLUMNISTS, BOTH PRIVATELY AND PUBLICLY, HAVE EXPRESSED THEIR ADMIRATION FOR THE ROLE OF THE PRESS AS PARTNERS--TOGETHER WITH THE AMERICAN CONGRESS, THE COURTS AND PUBLIC OPINION--IN THE RESOLUTION OF THE WATERGATE CRISIS. IN PART, THEREFORE, THE "TRIUMPH OF A SYSTEM" IS VICARIOUSLY THEIR TRIUMPH TOO. A CARTOON WITHOUT COMMENT OR CAPTION ON THE FRONT PAGE OF THE SUNDAY STANDARD (SUNDAY VERSION OF THE EXPRESS) REPRESENTED THE GREAT SEAL OF THE US IN WHICH THE SHIELD OVER THE BREAST OF A MAJESTIC EAGLE WAS LABELED, "THE PRESS".

6. THE TONE AND TENOR OF PRESS REACTION HERE TO THE DENOUEMENT OF THE WATERGATE DRAMA WAS IN CONSEQUENCE DETERMINED NOT ONLY BY THE INDIAN EDITORS' PROFESSIONAL INSTINCT TO GO WITH A BIG STORY BUT IN SIGNIFICANT MEASURE AS WELL BY THEIR DESIRE TO SHARE, HOWEVER REMOTELY, IN A MEANINGFUL SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ROLE FOR THE PRESS THAT IS LARGELY UNFULFILLED IN INDIA.  
HENSING

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